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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0453
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1711
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1431
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0644
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2493
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0386
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0290
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SNAR

SUBJECT: IRAN-VENEZUELA: FRANCE TOUGH ON NUCLEAR ISSUE,
NEEDS MORE EVIDENCE ON TERRORISM

REF: A. STATE 61378

[1](#)B. PARIS 1844

Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: In response to ref A demarche, MFA DAS-equivalent for South America Pinard assured us May 16 that President Chirac had taken a hard line with Chavez on Iran's nuclear weapons program during their last phone conversation before Chirac leaves office on May 16, and surmised that Chavez's policy toward Iran was based entirely on his "anti-U.S. obsession." Although he knew of no Venezuelan involvement in or support for Iranian terrorism, Pinard said France would be prepared to revise its views on the basis of U.S.-provided evidence. He argued that problems with Venezuelan travel documents were no worse than with other countries of the region, although he admitted that Colombian drug traffickers were attracted to Venezuelan passports because they enabled the bearer to enter the Schengen space without a visa. He criticized as inconsistent the U.S. policy of asking Venezuela to do more to stop drug traffickers while denying it the technical means to succeed. We should seize on Sarkozy's professed interest in human rights issues to urge the GOF to take a more critical view of the situation in Cuba and Venezuela; we would also recommend a high-level visit in the late summer or early fall. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

[1](#)2. (C) POL Deputy delivered ref A oral demarche May 15 to MFA DAS-equivalent for South American Affairs Michel Pinard and Venezuela desk officer Lionel Paradisi, emphasizing the growing diplomatic, political, social, and economic ties between Venezuela and Iran and their potential repercussions for the struggle against terrorism and proliferation, as well as implementation of UNSC sanctions.

CHIRAC TELLS CHAVEZ ON IRAN

[1](#)3. (C) In response, Pinard reported that Chavez had initiated a last phone call with President Jacques Chirac about two weeks ago to bid farewell before the latter's term of office ends on May 16. In a brief review of French-Venezuelan relations, Chirac had described them as positive in some areas and disappointing in others. But saving the most important for last, Chirac had stated unequivocally that France had one strong concern ("forte preoccupation"), namely, Venezuela's advocacy in favor of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Pinard added that MFA IO

Assistant Secretary-equivalent Sylvie Bermann had traveled to Caracas several weeks ago to express France's concerns about the positions Venezuela had taken in the IAEA on the Iranian nuclear program. When asked, Pinard said he unfortunately did not know whether or how Chavez had replied to Chirac; he said that information may have been lost in the shuffle to vacate the Presidential palace for Sarkozy's incoming staff.

CHAVEZ'S "ANTI-U.S." OBSESSION TO BLAME

¶4. (C) Pinard said Paris had no real problems with Venezuelan-Iranian coordination on energy and oil prices to the extent that this was part of the "rules of the game" and both countries had a logical interest in obtaining the highest possible prices. Similarly, the GOF had not protested too strenuously against Venezuela's nationalization of oil fields, given that France's Total preferred to assume a low public profile on the issue and France generally had good business relations with Venezuela. The problem for France arose, he continued, when Chavez's "anti-U.S. obsession" led him beyond the bounds of the normal to the indefensible. While the GOF believed that Venezuela did not present a threat to anyone, and had no territorial designs on its own neighbors, Chavez's obsession led him to align himself blindly with actors who did have such designs. He thus continued to support Iran even when its actions were in violation of its international commitments and it was subject to UNSC sanctions.

NO EVIDENCE OF TERRORISM LINK, BUT...

¶5. (S) Pinard said the GOF had no information at its disposal that suggested the scantiest Venezuelan support for terrorism. As far as he knew, Venezuela was not involved in

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financing Hezbollah in Lebanon, the GSPC in Algeria, or other organizations elsewhere. Nor did the GOF have any information suggesting that terrorists were receiving training or other assistance in Venezuela. Pinard waved off past Iranian involvement in terrorist acts in Argentina, describing Chavez as "illuminated" but not "completely crazy." It was one thing to rhetorically invest in "revolutionary thought" or extol the "Bolivarian revolution," but quite another actively to support real terrorism. Pinard asserted that he personally would agitate for a French hard line in this regard if the U.S. were to present France with hard evidence of Venezuelan support for Iranian terrorist activity.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

¶6. (C) Pinard acknowledged certain problems with Venezuelan travel documents, while suggesting that Venezuela was no different in this respect from most other countries in the region. Local corruption rather than official action was the likely culprit. Drugs also played a role, since Colombian drug traffickers can enter the Schengen space without a visa if they have a Venezuelan passport. Pinard asserted that drug-trafficking measures were stringent at the Caracas airport (he recounted a personal anecdote to make his point), whereas the coastline was not adequately policed. Calling U.S. policy inconsistent on this point, Pinard argued that if the USG wanted Venezuela to patrol its coasts, then it should allow the country to purchase the technical means to do so.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) President-elect Sarkozy takes office May 16, and France will have a new government and foreign minister by May 21 at the latest. Sarkozy has already indicated (ref B) that he intends to give human rights a more prominent place in French foreign policy, which could have significant implications for French policy toward Cuba and Latin America. Sarkozy lacks Chirac's and the Left's romantic attachment to Latin America and its revolutionaries, and he is also likely

to have a much colder view of Chavez particularly now that Chavez has asserted national control over Venezuela's oil fields. Sarkozy has continued the current government's repeated calls for more action to free Ingrid Betancourt from her detention by the FARC, including in his post-election remarks. We should seize on Sarkozy's professed interest in human rights issues to urge the GOF to take a more critical view of the situation in Cuba and Venezuela. Toward that end, we would recommend a visit by A/S Shannon in the late summer or early fall.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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